

# ***H.B. No. 7027***

My name is Dan Varley and I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to speak about house bill #7027, an act concerning the state budget for the biennium ending June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

I am currently a Program Coordinator of the Individual Employment Services Program operated by Easter Seals Goodwill Industries (ESGI) in New Haven. Prior to this position, I was an Employment Specialist and a Program Coordinator for ESGI's Community Reentry Services program in Middletown. This program lost its state funding in July of 2016 after serving the Middletown and New Haven community for a number of years. This funding loss was one of many experienced by vital community programs for returning citizens. Prior to working for the program, I was also a client of Easter Seals Goodwill Industries. Due to my own poor decision I spent 10 years in prison on a drug conspiracy and firearms charge. When I came home I had gaps in my work history and I had no idea how to address my criminal history to an employer. I was filled with fear, anxiety and confusion, over how much had changed in the years I languished in prison. Online Job Applications, one page resume's, how to market my skills, and how to talk about my background to a potential employer. Even Facebook, Linkedin and social media were all new to me. If not for the ESGI community reentry program, and their ability to fulfill their mission I do not know where I would be today.

I could tell you more about my journey-losing both parents my first year following my release from prison, undergoing cervical fusion in my second year, and despite that excelling at work and completing my bachelor's degree this past January. But I am here tonight to be voice for the men and women that will be returning home to our communities. People like KM- who did 6 years for a bank robbery. After graduating our program, he went to work in a fast food store and a retail store. He has his own place, has received a raise at both jobs-and is paying off his child support. I still meet him for breakfast to encourage him to pursue his Driver License and a Personal Trainer certification. I want to tell you about W. S, a young father of two with no legal work history to speak of. With our support he started working at a restaurant and is now a supervisor. He is paying taxes, taking care of his children and succeeding. Let me tell you about TS. She had a number of drug convictions

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and a shoplifting charge. Two months after graduating the program we wrote a letter to an HR manager about her background after an initial offer of employment had been made(See attached). I was in that store at Christmas time and she introduced me to her Store Manager-and called me her mentor. This is the first time I spoke of that experience. THAT was my Christmas gift this year. She is finishing her Medical Assistant certificate from Branford Hall in May.

These are only a few of the success stories from the short time I worked in the CRS program. 95% of incarcerated citizens are coming home. Helping them find sustainable employment is critical for success. Finding the funds to invest in people now is not only the right thing to do, but it makes fiscal sense. I was here at the Capital for the Malta Justice Initiative breakfast and I heard from Republicans and Democrats alike about the impact that that book, and it's ideas, had on you. Thanks to Gov Malloy and Commissioner Semple, CT has made some great strides in the criminal justice reform movement. This is not the time to stop. It is time keep pushing forward to show that together we can reduce recidivism, and reduce crime at the same time.